The (Autobiographical) Sources of Frankenstein

Research · October 2015

DOI: 10.13140/RG.2.1.5066.3124

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The (autobiographical) sources of Frankenstein.

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1. Introduction.

It is well known that on 16th or 17th June 1816 the novel *Frankenstein* was "engendered" near the Lake Geneva and that in January 1818 it "was born". It is also known that "the mother" of such a powerful novel was a young Mary Shelley, aged only nineteen when her "hideous progeny" came to light, and that its germ was a daydream in which she saw a "pale student of unhallowed arts knelling beside the thing he had put together"[1].

Writers may create fiction from multiple sources: their own imagination, their experiences, their beliefs or the world around them. Mary Shelley's masterpiece *Frankenstein* shows a combination of sources on its elaboration. An exhaustive analysis of all those sources would go beyond the scope of this work, so I will only focus on the two main characters, Victor Frankenstein and his Creature, to try to ascertain what the sources of inspiration used for their creation are.

In my opinion, Mary Shelley's inspiration was derived primarily from her own experiences as a daughter and wife of two of the most important literary figures of her age, but specially from her most intimate and personal life. As a great artist, she elaborated those experiences in order to create a unique novel which was a precursor in its time and created a new genre: the science fiction novel.

Anne Mellor has interpreted *Frankenstein* "as an extended analysis of what happens both psychologically and socially, when … a family and specially a loving parent is absent" (Mellor, 215). In fact, both Mary Shelley and the creature in the novel lacked parental love and nurturing in their infancy. Mary had to suffer the premature death of her mother and the neglect of her father. Later on, during the years she lived with Percy, Mary experienced a similar sense of abandonment on the part of her lover.

1. Preface to the 1831 edition of *Frankenstein*.

My aim is to explore the biography of Mary Shelley as the main source of inspiration for *Frankenstein.* Bearing this purpose in mind I will briefly outline her biography, paying attention to those aspects that influenced the composition of *Frankenstein*. I will also explore her relationship with her father, William Godwin, and her husband, Percy Bysshe Shelley, on whom I consider the character of Victor Frankenstein is based. Then I will explore the character of the creature and its relationship with Mary Shelley herself. Another chapter is devoted to the influence of Shelley's parents as outstanding figures of their age in education and philosophy. I also want to include a brief exploration of Mary's unconscious desires that are undoubtedly reflected in the novel, as well as an insight into the features common to her most important novels that are based on her own life. And finally I will revise other minor sources used for the composition of *Frankenstein.*

2. A Sad Childhood.

The writer known as Mary Shelley was born Mary Godwin Wollstonecraft, the only daughter of the radical philosopher William Godwin and the novelist and feminist Mary Wollstonecraft. Only eleven days after her birth, Mary's mother died of puerperal fever. Mary and her stepsister Fanny (the daughter of Mary Wollstonecraft and her former lover, Gilbert Imlay) remained under the care of Godwin.

After Mary Wollstonecraft's death, "Godwin became closer to the children" (Mellor, 5), and this was the span of time in which he devoted more affection and care to Mary. The bonds between father and daughter were closer than ever and according to Mellor (9), Mary began to develop an "excessive & romantic attachment" for her father. Mellor claims that Mary experienced "anxiety lest her father abandoned her" (6). We will see that this excessive filial love was not corresponded the way Mary wished.

In 1801, when Mary was only four, William Godwin married Mary Jane Clairmont, a widow with two children. Mary Jane Clairmont was described by Lamb as a "damn'd disagreeable woman" (qtd. in Mellor, 6) who took care of Mary, but felt little sympathy for her. Clairmont already had two children from her former husband and had a third one by Godwin.

Lacking a mother's love, Mary grew up worshiping her father, as she herself recognized in a letter to Jane Williams (Mellor, 179), though Godwin did not give her as much attention as she needed. According to Mellor, "her father had withdrawn from his children in order to pursue his increasingly unsuccessful writing career" (79), leaving the care of the five children to his wife.

When the girl was about twelve, Mrs. Godwin began to detect Mary's "excessive & romantic attachment to [her] father"[2] and she began to feel somewhat jealous of her. Mrs. Godwin "resented Mary's intense affection for Godwin" and thus, she "constantly encroached on Mary's privacy, demanding that she do household chores, opening her letters and limiting her access to her father", the later should be perhaps the most painful punishment for Mary. For Mellor, Mary "constructed Mrs. Godwin as the opposite of everything she had learned to worship in her own dead mother" (Mellor,12) and made her to detest such an "odious" woman, as she herself described her stepmother to Marianne Hunt (qtd. in Mellor, 12).

Their relationship was really difficult and led to Mary's stay for two years in Scotland with the Baxter family when she was almost fifteen. Even her own father began to feel distanced from her, tired of the continuous jealousies in the house.

When she came back from Scotland in 1814, Mary met a young poet who deeply admired her father and frequently visited him. His name was Percy Bysshe Shelley and

2. Letter to Mary Revely Gisborne, quoted in Mellor, 8.

within a few weeks they had fallen in love. Unfortunately, Percy was married to a woman he did not "passionately love", but to whom he felt "obliged to rescue from a tyrannical father" (Mellor, 18).

In spite of Godwin's former advocacy against marriage – he considered it as "the most odious of all monopolies" (Godwin 1793) –, he censured the relationship between Mary and Percy, but as they could not avoid to love each other they decided to flee to France on July 18, 1814, taking Jane Clairmont (later called Claire Clairmont), Mary's stepsister, with them.

Mrs. Godwin could not forgive Mary for taking her daughter with her. William Godwin shared her opinions and "could see Mary only as a home-wrecker who broke up Shelley's marriage with Harriet and a disobedient daughter" (Mellor, 22). This reaction on the part of the author of *Enquiry on Political Justice,* was quite contradictory since he had been an ardent advocate of free love and he and Mary Wollstonecraft had married only for the sake of their still unborn child, thus his subsequent refusal "to see or write to Mary for the next two and a half years" (Mellor, 22), caused her a great sadness. From my point of view, it was an excessive punishment on his part, so it is no wonder that as he refused his parental love to his daughter, she sought it in Percy.

It is significant the note she wrote to Percy only three weeks after their elopement:

> Tomorrow I will seal this blessing on your lips dear good creature press me to you and hug your own Mary to your heart *perhaps she will one day have a father* till then be everything to me love – & indeed I will be a good girl and never vex you anymore I will learn Greek and – (Mellor, 23. Emphasis mine).

She was certainly missing her father and feeling sorry for Godwin's refusal to keep in touch with her. The previous argument with her father and his punishment were perhaps unbearable for such a loving daughter. The sentence "indeed I will be a good girl and never vex you anymore" may reveal that the note could have been written after a falling out with Percy; if we add up the fact that the previous problems with her father was perhaps unbearable for her, it is possible to conclude that she could have linked both events mentioning both men in the same note.

3. The character of Victor Frankenstein.

I consider that Mary Shelley constructed her first novel, *Frankenstein,* using her own living experiences. The people she knew best were her models for the main characters. That way, her father and her husband were her inspiration for the building of Victor Frankenstein, a man consecrated to an egotistical pursuit, interested in creating "[a] new species [that] would bless me as its creator and source" (55), who later abandoned the result of that quest (his creature) when he most needed his protection. Mary Shelley was portraying in Victor Frankenstein the lack of nurturing love and support that a father owes to his children. Precisely, the two most important men in her life failed to fulfill that duty towards her.

The result of such an egotism and selfishness produced a monster: the creature, who emotionally could be equated to Mary herself, always longing for real love.

3.1. William Godwin.

Anne Mellor rightly claims in the preface of her book *Mary Shelley, Her Life, Her Fiction, Her Monsters* that "Frankenstein analyses the disastrous consequences of the absence of nurturing parent or supportive family" (Mellor XII). Mary Shelley knew exactly what she was talking about when she wrote the novel because she herself had

suffered the neglect from her own father and the absence of her mother. Afterwards, when she lived with Percy, Mary experienced a similar sense of abandonment on the part of her lover, later her husband.

Alan Rauch cites Godwin's sentiments in his *Enquiry Concerning Political Justice*: "knowledge, and the enlargement of intellect, are poor, when unmixed with sentiments of benevolence and sympathy...and science and abstraction will soon become cold, unless they derive new attractions from ideas of society" (Rauch, 234). Mary must have had this sentence in mind when she wrote *Frankenstein* because it expresses one of the central themes of the novel: Victor Frankenstein, who has just lost his mother, dedicates his life and studies to discover “the secrets of heaven and earth” (39), which may allow him to revive his dead mother. This makes him to lose contact with his family and relations and to become an obscure and gloomy character. The result is disastrous, as the product of his work causes the death and destruction of all his family and beloved ones. As Victor centers himself obsessively in the “enlargement of [his] intellect”, he loses the sense of those good “sentiments” that would have redeemed him. He does not even feels sympathy for his creature, to whom he abandons at his own expense the moment he opens his “watery eyes” (58) and eventually, this leads the creator to a path of despair.

This simple sentence written by her father is one of the pillars upon which Shelley’s first novel was based, but it is not the only one. Godwin's influence pervades the novel and inspired Mary for the construction of the main character, Victor Frankenstein. González Moreno considers that “Víctor representaría una dura crítica – igualmente monstruosa – contra las ideas filosóficas de su padre, Godwin.” (González Moreno, 194). Not only philosophical ideas are exposed in *Frankenstein*, but also

Godwin's private behaviour concerning his daughter: his ambivalences, his lack of concern and his criticisms of her might have made Mary develop a sense of resentment towards her father which is (un)consciously projected in the character of Frankenstein.

In her biography of Mary Shelley, Mellor claims that "Godwin had deliberately distanced himself from his daughter" after his marriage. For the biographer Don Locke he "had found it easier to express his obvious affection when his daughters were small, but as they grew older together, he became remote and awkward, more dutiful than sensitive, unable to show what he really felt for them" (Mellor, 13). Mary resented that displacement of her father's affection. Her former place as a beloved daughter was occupied by the rest of her brothers and sisters and specially by Mrs. Godwin.

Another important point is the fact that "Mary Shelley dedicated the novel to Godwin, even though he had disowned her after her elopement, rather than to Percy Shelley who helped her with its composition. She wanted to give the book to its father, *her* father, for the book is her created self as well as her child" (Mellor, 54). Chris Baldrick considers that it was because he was "in so many ways the novel's intellectual begetter" (Botting, 65). I disagree with both. Could it not be the case that she was so resentful that she wanted to highlight it by dedicating it to the man who had disowned her? This dedication may be ironical since, as we will see, Mary uses the character of the creature to articulate her feelings of neglect. From my point of view, it could have been an attempt to call her father's attention rather than an acknowledgement.

In spite of her pure and unconditional love for her father, Mary Shelley could appreciate his egotism. For Mellor, masculine egotism

> is displayed by many of her male protagonists, from Victor Frankenstein through Castruccio and Mathilda's father to Lodore and Falkner. All these men willingly sacrifice the good of others to forward their own ambitions. They are indifferent to the feelings and needs of even those whom they most love (Mellor, 205).

In *Frankenstein*, this egotism is contrasted to "a female ethic of care, service and self-sacrifice" (Mellor 205). As an illustration, we can take two examples from the novel: the first one is the death of Caroline Frankenstein, after attending Elizabeth's sickbed when she had scarlet fever. Caroline's "watchful attentions triumphed over the malignant of the distemper" (44) and achieved the restoration of her daughter's health at the cost of her own. The second example is Elizabeth's sacrifice on behalf of Victor. Unaware of the dangerous of his actions, Victor leaves her alone, resolved to engage in fierce fight against the creature. Once again, he egotistically considers himself the target of the creature's revenge – "resolved that I would sell my life dearly" – (198), ignoring other people and leaving Elizabeth unprotected.

Frankenstein is egotistic to the point of not needing a woman for creating a child, reversing in that way the natural order and displacing the role of the woman in order to be the sole origin of "his offspring". Nevertheless, he does not embody the role of both progenitors, not even one of them, since he leaves his child completely alone to face the world. Mellor sees "Frankenstein's failure to care for his creature" in sharp contrast to Victor's own infancy (Mellor, 175)[3].

Shelley prefers to represent nurturing women, the ones who, through sacrifice and disinterest "can prevent the making of monsters capable of destroying us all" (Mellor, 216).

3. See chapter on "The Absence of the Mother"

Nevertheless, Shelley's women are always dependent on male characters. According to Mellor, "[t]he absence from her novels of independent, self-fulfilled, nurturant women records Mary Shelley's oblique recognition that such a woman does not survive in the world she knew." Even such an intelligent woman as she herself was, remained attached for life to the men she loved, her father and her husband even after he passed away, in spite of their rejections and infidelities. This idea could have been a reaction to her mother's ideas about self-determination and independence for women, which were so criticized after the publication of *Memoirs of the Author of A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (Mellor, 210).

William Godwin's egotism was patent in his life. He was more interested in Percy Bysshe Shelley's money than in his daughter's happiness as he "continued to threaten to withhold his affection from Mary unless she persuaded Percy to lend him the ever larger sums of money to which his (self-serving) theory of the just distribution of wealth convinced him he was entitled" (Mellor 193). In fact, "by the time he died in 1822, Shelley had lent Godwin over £4,000, none of which Godwin repaid" (Mellor, 31). In spite of Mary's intercession on behalf of her father, he continued without speaking to her, even after Mary gave birth to a son she named William after her father (Mellor, 36).

The Bodleian Library keeps part of the correspondence of the members of the Godwin Wollstonecraft family. Godwin's letters to Percy Bysshe Shelley written in 1817-18 mainly concern loans and monetary issues. In one of them, dated January 31, 1818, Godwin "acknowledge[s] the receipt of the sum mentioned in [Shelley's] letter" at the same time he expresses his "disappointment" for the "difference between the sum

[Godwin had] now received & the sum [Shelley] thought [him] to expect" (Bodleian Library). No references are made to Mary or her children in that letter.

The worst instance of that selfishness occurred after his grandchild, William, died from malaria in 1819. In a letter written to his daughter after the death of the child, on September 9, 1819, William Godwin shows his most cruel side. Instead of commiserating with his depressed daughter, he recriminates her that she has everything she wants: "the husband of [her] choice", and "all the goods of fortune" (Bodelian Library), but this is not enough for Mary, "all the rest of the world, all that is beautiful, and all that has a claim upon your kindness, is nothing, because a child of three years old is dead!" (Mellor, 194). It is difficult to believe that a grandfather cannot be moved after the loss of his grandchild. However, Godwin preferred to focus on the matters that most interested him: money. As Percy Bysshe Shelley expressed in a letter to Leigh Hunt at that time, Godwin "tried to persuade her that I was under great engagements to give him *more* money" (Mellor, 194). Godwin's cruelty seems to have no limits when, in another letter he wrote about Mary's melancholy: "Remember too, though at first your nearest connections may pity you in this state, yet that when they see you fixed in selfishness and ill humor, . . . they will finally cease to love you, and scarcely learn to endure you" (qtd. in Knoepfmacher, 113).

The most striking thing of this father-daughter relationship is the fact that he "abruptly forgave Mary and Percy after their marriage" in 1816 (Mellor, 193); nevertheless, he had kept his ties to Percy during the previous years.

However, as I have said above, this does not mean that she was unaware of her father's defects, which are reflected in Victor Frankenstein's character. Mellor considers that Mary Shelley had felt rejected by her father twice: "emotionally when he married

Mary Jane Clairmont, and overtly when she eloped with Percy Bysshe Shelley (Mellor, 47). This may have been the reason for which she had "long repressed a hostility to Godwin that erupted in the murder of his namesake" (Mellor, 47), or said in other words, the creature kills Victor's youngest brother, named William, just like Shelley's brother, father and son. The election of the name of Victor's brother is not gratuitous since it stands as a symbol for her father. But at the same time, this raises another topic: his death articulates "Mary Shelley's horrified recognition that she is capable of imagining the murder of her own child … and the instinctive revulsion against that act" (Mellor, 47). One of the reasons argued by Anna Motz to explain infanticide is "the inability (of a mother) to tolerate the baby's tremendous dependence on her … and the memory of *her own inability to have her own needs met by her mother* (emphasis mine)" (Motz, 112). In fact, Shelley could not have her needs met by her mother, to whom she had not known, and this could have erupted in the fictional killing of the boy, although considering the name I suggest that she was mainly pointing out her father.

Ester Schor considers Frankenstein and his wish to create "a new species" which would bless [him] as his creator and source" as a "critique to Godwinian idealism as set out in … *Political Justice*", which states that "mind will one day become omnipotent over matter" (Godwin 1793). This immoderate rationalism was attacked in *Frankenstein* by his daughter, who considers that an excessive interest in the cultivation of the mind may bring about a cut off from the affections: "[i]f the study to which you apply yourself has a tendency to weaken your affections … then that study is certainly unlawful, that is to say, not beneficial to the human life" (Shelley, 56). Ironically, before the creature was created, Victor fantasized that "No father could claim the gratitude of

his child so completely as I should deserve their's."(Shelley, 55); in practice, the father was unworthy of such a gratitude since he abandoned the child right after his birth.

Some of *Frankenstein*'s main themes had already been explored by William Godwin in some of his most famous novels. These works had been read by Mary Shelley when she wrote her novel and exerted some influence upon her. In *Saint Leon,* for example, we find "overweening public ambitions symbolized by secret occult practices, lead to the breakdown of family life" (Clemit). As I have already said, in *Frankenstein*, this ambition is to create "a new species" which may satisfy the ambitions of his creator; this is achieved through the working "in vaults and charnel-houses" (53). Unfortunately, the product of such an effort only brings suffering, death and the total destruction of the family. At the end of both novels, Clemit argues, "while *Saint Leon* warns against the neglect of domestic ties in pursuit of the ideal, he is still fascinated by the prospect of wealth and social power", and likewise, "Frankenstein is ultimately unwilling to abandon his misguided revolutionary ambitions, despite their human costs" (32). Both characters are unable to learn from their own mistakes, so it is no wonder that some critics of their age considered that *Frankenstein* was "formed on the Godwinian manner, and has all the faults, but many likewise of the beauties of that model" (The Edinburgh Magazine and Literary Miscellany, 249-53).

The other novel written by Godwin that bears some similarities with *Frankenstein* is *Caleb Williams,* in which "Caleb is cast as a monster for daring to challenge Falkland's social authority, but it is Falkland who becomes an inhuman tyrant" (Clemit). Hierarchy is also subverted in *Frankenstein* when the creature orders Victor: "Thou are my creator, but I am your master, obey!" (172), however, this

behavior is “expected”[4] in a monstrous being because we presuppose him evil intentions and obscure desires.

3.2. Percy Bysshe Shelley.

Percy and Mary met after her return from Scotland. Mellor states that “[f]or Mary, Percy was a youthful version of her father, a revolutionary and a philosopher, but one who, in contrast to Godwin, might fully reciprocate her love and embrace her as his companion” (Mellor, 20). So, in some sense, she displaced her love from her father to her (new) lover.

However, Mary’s relationship with Percy Bysshe Shelley was far from being one of perfect harmony. A few months after their elopement, perhaps during the winter 1814-15, Percy began an affair with Claire Clairmont, Mary’s stepsister. He preferred Claire’s company even in the worst moments for Mary, such as after the dead of her first daughter. Mary resented deeply Percy’s behavior and lack of sensibility towards her and this lead to a bitterness that estranged the couple during their last years together. Mellor asserts that Percy was “singularly unconcerned with the welfare of his female children and unmoved by their deaths” (Mellor, 32). Mary would later fuse Percy Bysshe Shelley’s, as well as Godwin's, lack of parental concern for his children in the fictional form of Victor Frankenstein’s abandonment of his creature. This, added to his “inability to satisfy the financial needs” (Mellor, 80) of his children, is portrayed in “Victor’s inability to love and care for his monster” (Mellor, 80).

It must be added that Percy’s financial situation was not very good. During the first years of his relationship with Mary, he had no income but for his publications and

4. Bush, Ronald "Monstrosity and Representation in the Postcolonial Diaspora: The Satanic Verses, Ulysses, and Frankenstein," in Borders, Exiles, Diasporas, eds. Elazar Barkan and Marie-Denise Shelton (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998), p.245. Qtd in Hoeveler.

for some time he had to hide from creditors. Not until 1815 his grandfather named him baronet and an allowance was granted for him and his first male heir.

Another point in common between Percy and Victor, and indeed Godwin, is their intense quest. Victor engages in a scientific search that even estranges him from his family and friends (Mellor, 76), while Percy is engaged in a poetic quest.

Dussinger rightly asserts that "unlike Mary, who agonized over the frequent births and deaths in their circle, Percy seems to have fulfilled the Godwinian ideal of freedom from guilt." This freedom of guilt, that in Small's words means that "a bad conscience is irrational"[5], made him follow his own will and wishes, even when the situation would have required of him a different response. For example, he was blamed "for the death of their son William" (Ginn) but he still kept going out with other women – Claire Clairmont, Maria Gisborne – instead of comforting his wife (Mellor, 142).

As we will see, Mary Shelley was completely identified with the creature, while Shelley seemed to be more concerned with Victor's character as "creator". His revisions of the character reveal that he "read Victor Frankenstein sympathetically" (Mellor, 63). For instance, after his review of the novel, Victor "ceases to be the perpetrator, but only the "victim" of evil" and the scientist's errors are "softened or eliminated" (63). He erroneously "introduced all the references to Victor Frankenstein as the "author" of the creature... [s]ince it is Percy rather than Mary who sees [him] as an author". He also added some points that stressed the devilish nature of the creature, when, for example, he defined him as an "abortion" (Shelley, 224). He clearly misunderstood his wife's intentions, because, as Mellor perceptively states, she "never suggested that [the creature] was other than fully human" (Mellor, 63).

5. Cristopher Small, quoted in Dussinger, 54.

4. The creature.

Many critics of Frankenstein define the product of Victor's work as a monster and refer to him as "it". I have a different conception of him and prefer to treat him a as a human being, although artificial for not having being made following the normal course of nature. I consider that his humanity is evident, and his feelings are not different from those of any real person.

Notwithstanding his interior, I cannot obviate his external appearance, so decisive to define the way he is treated. He looks like a monster, offering a hideous vision that repels people. Even his own creator abandons him horrified the moment he opens his "watery eyes", "unable to endure the aspect of the being [he] had created" (58). Victor defines his creation as a "monster" from the very moment he comes to life (59).

At this point, we should ask ourselves: why is he a monster? In the preface of his book *Frankenstein*, Fred Botting gives us a reason: he fails "to conform to neoclassical aesthetic ideals of unified design, harmonious composition of parts in simple regularity and proportion" (Botting, 5). The creature possesses some beautiful and proportionate features (his limbs, his hair and his teeth) in contrast with his eyes, "his shriveled complexion and straight black lips" (58), but his gigantic stature defines his monstrosity. Such a gigantic being inspires horror just because he is above the average or, in other words, he is disproportionate if compared with the rest of the population and therefore not conforming to the neoclassical ideal.

Foucault considers that "the monster ensures the emergence of the difference"[6] because it is in opposition to the rest of the people, to the non-monsters. It also signals

6. Foucault, *The Order of Things*, 154-7, cited in Botting, 7.

"the variety and diversity of nature's continuity"[7], however this monster was unnatural, because he was "assembled" by a man, just like a piece of manufactured work. No doubt, Paul O'Flinn is right when he claims that "the novel makes him human" (Botting, 37) by showing that he has a soul.

O'Flinn also explains that the word "monster" had added connotations in the nineteenth century. It meant not only "a strange or horrible imaginary creature, something that is extremely or unusually large or a powerful person or thing that cannot be controlled and that causes many problems" (Merriam Webster Dictionary), but it also had a moral meaning. For Shakespeare it was "a way of defining moral aberrations" (Botting, 49), which made the monster even more horrible to the audience. But how can we judge the moral nature of the creature when he is just born? The association between his physical appearance and his moral self is improper and creates the distorted image we have today concerning the creature: that of an evil being.

Mary Shelley perhaps had in mind the idea of humanity when she constructed the character of the creature. I am convinced that the author used him to express her own ideas and that to some extent she felt identified with him. She gave prominence to the creature by allowing him to tell his tale at the centre of the novel.

Paula Clemit considers that the creature curses Frankenstein "for denying him full humanity"; nonetheless it is not his acknowledgment of "more humanity" what he longs to achieve, but the contact with humans. The point is that it is society which turns his benevolence into rage and evil: "Everywhere I see bliss, from which I alone am irrevocably *excluded*. I was benevolent and good; misery made me a fiend" (Shelley, 103. Emphasis mine). According to behavioral theories, violence "isn't a natural

7. Ibid.

strategy in the human repertoire; it is learned" (Pinker, 270) and the creature learns how to be violent thanks to the people in the village who "fled [or] attacked" him (Shelley, 109) and to Felix who "struck [him] violently with a stick" (Shelley, 137). Richard Rhodes argues in *Why They Kill* that "people who have been victimized often become victimizers themselves" (Pinker, 267), which explains why the abused creature haunts Victor and becomes his scourge through the assassination of his relatives and friends.

Clemit points out that "the creature instinctively seeks society", but society shuns him and, for that reason, he resolves to ask his creator to produce a being "of another sex, as hideous as [him]self" (Shelley, 148) to make him company. When Frankenstein resolves to destroy the half-made being, the creature gets angry at him because he has "dare[d] destroy [his] hopes" (Shelley, 172). He has human reasons and human feelings for that anger, as a human being as any real person. His only superhuman feature is his countenance, gigantic proportions and strength, which makes the expression of his feelings to acquire disproportionate consequences.

Godwin's maxim "[p]rivate education is almost necessarily deficient in excitements. Society is the true awakener of man" draws on the isolation felt by the creature. He is a naturally sociable being who looks for the company of other people. These people reject and even hound him, leaving him uneducated. It is in a different social circle, the microcosm of the De Lacey family, where he is awakened to education. Through observation and overhearing[8] form a hidden place, the creature learns the most basic rules of coexistence, but also other complex tasks as for example, language, the value of feelings or mutual help, reading, or philosophical concepts concerning

8. "What is a monster?", by Peter Brooks, in Botting, 87.

“civilizations”, that is, society. So, he becomes socialized through contact with society and mimic, even though he is not immersed within the family.

The problem begins when he introduces himself to the family: those who are able to see him (except the blind father) feel horrified. The creature is judged by his appearance, not by his actions or, in Freeman’s words, “the monster’s monstrosity is an effect of how he looks, not what he does” (24). So, his monstrosity is not in himself, but in the eyes that look at him. It is the “fatal prejudice [that] clouds their eyes” (Shelley, 136) what makes them reject a benevolent being.

Father De Lacey is the only one who feels sympathy for the creature and it is for two reasons. The first one is that he cannot see the creature’s countenance and gigantic size, and therefore, he cannot misjudge him. The second reason is that he feels identified whit the creature because he and “[his] family have been condemned, although innocent” (Shelley, 137), just like the creature has been rejected by society for doing nothing.

Mellor argues that “by seeing the creature’s countenance as evil, the characters in the novel force him to *become* evil” (Shelley, 134). For that reason, he “turns to the wickedness that has been expected of him" (Bush, qtd. in Hoeveler, 56) and when the De Laceys flee from the house, the creature burns it in anger.

Mellor also sees the creature as a mirror of Mary Shelley’s life in episodes such as the creature's “desperate attempts to establish a bond of affection with the De Lacey family” which she was drawing on her own experience of emotional isolation” (Mellor, 44). Those attempts are as unsuccessful as the author’s to regain the affection of her father.

One of the most striking issues of this novel is the fact that one of the main characters, the creature, has no name. His creator fled before giving him one, he simply omitted that. The significance of names in our culture makes the reader aware that something important is missing: he was given life, but not an identity. That identity had to be constructed by the creature himself. If even a pet has a name, why not a manufactured person? This ambivalence in the same being, a human with no identity, a monster who possesses human feelings, is one of the key issues of the novel.

On its first performance on stage,[9] the creature was listed in the dramatist personae as "******* [played by] Mr. O. Smith"; Shelley approved "this nameless mode of naming the unnameable" (qtd. in Mellor, 134). Gilbert and Gubar link the significance of the name as regard "social illegitimacy"(241). They use the example of Fanny Imlay, who was an illegitimate child and committed suicide when she knew that she was Imlay's daughter, not Godwin's (242). Having a different name from her supposed father was a question of extreme importance for her. The creature is in an intermediate place too: he is not Frankenstein's son because he has not been engendered by him, but he is his product. He has "been born" unnaturally and therefore cannot enjoy full recognition as a human being (for example, having a name or living in society). He is an outcast, a nameless monster.

Some critics have highlighted the creature's otherness: H. L. Malchow considers that "it needs to be read within the tradition in which the mixed-race person was often represented as an ambivalent creature torn between different cultures and loyalties, an outcast, a misfit, and a biological unnatural" (qtd. in Hoeveler). The creature is too

9. Frankenstein*: or, The Man and the Monster. A Romantic Melodrama in Two Acts,* by H. M. Milners, first performed at the Royal Coubourg Theatre, London, in 1826.

different from the rest of the people (the villagers, the De Laceys, even from Frankenstein) to be integrated in their circle. This difference is impossible to change. Simi Linton considers him as "disabled in a society that values external beauty … conformity and stable gender and class determinacy" (qtd. in Hoeveler). According to Denise Gigante, this disability "can never be altered" (qtd. in Hoeveler), for that reason the creature's only chance is to hide or to escape. He could never live in society, so he provokes the only person who knows him and has a certain bond with him, his creator, to pursue him for miles. The creature runs along deserted places ("the daemon generally avoided [the courses of the rivers], as it was here that the population of the country chiefly collected", Shelley, 207) leaving traces, clues or "marks in writing on the barks of the trees, or cut in stone, that guided [Victor]" (Shelley, 208). The creature desires to call Victor's attention disguised as "everlasting hatred" (Shelley, 209). It is the only way for him to keep his ties with Victor, the only person who could accompany him in his solitary life. Once his creator dies, the creature has no reason to live and resolves to "consume to ashes [his] miserable frame" (Shelley, 224).

5. Godwin and Wollstonecraft on education.

The influence of both her parents in Mary Shelley's intellectual development, as well as in some aspects of her novel, was noteworthy.

Mary Wollstonecraft was a fervent advocate of education. According to Miranda Seymour, "[l]ike Godwin, and Locke before him, Mary was vigorously opposed to the notion that children should be restrained and checked", a highly innovative vision of education, considering how restrictive and repressive the educational system was at that time.

Wollstonecraft and Godwin's ideas were collected in *Enquire*, a "collection of essays which Godwin wrote while he and Mary were discussing the upbringing of the unborn child [Mary]" (Seymour, 25). For them, "the true object of education, like that of every other moral process is the generation of happiness" (Godwin 1797). This could have been quite true for Frankenstein's creature: had he had the proper education, guidance and love during his infancy, his life would have been happier. Instead, after a complete abandonment on the part of society and particularly of his own father/creator, he feels "miserable" and "wretched".

After Wollstonecraft's death and Godwin's second marriage with Clairmont, "all the Godwins' income went on educating Charles and Jane, while poor Fanny and Mary learnt nothing but housework"[10] (Seymour, 53). Mary received little formal education, but Seymour notes that "she was being taught in a way of which her mother would have approved" because she "was neither pushed, nor educationally deprived". Her education was achieved by extensive readings, access to her father's vast library and the visits to her house of the most important men of the age (poets, philosophers, scientists…) in an atmosphere of creativity which, no doubt, shaped Mary's intellectual development.

Godwinian pedagogical ideas were followed by Alphonse Frankenstein as he "inspired children to learn in a non-competitive atmosphere" (Mellor, 50), but his son Victor followed the wrong path of the "misleading alchemical treatises of Cornelius Agrippa, Paracelsus and Albertus Magnus, books which encouraged … a hubristic desire for human omnipotence" (Shelley, 50). On the contrary, the creature studied freely the humanistic books of his time: "Paradise Lost, Plutarch's Lives and The

10. Kegan Paul, *William Godwin: his Friends and Contemporaries*, qtd. in Seymour, 53.

Sorrows of Werter" (130), in which he discovered "lofty sentiments and feelings", "high thoughts", "the ardour for virtue", "the abhorrence of vice" and "feelings of wonder and awe". Mellor considers his as an "excellent education", in contrast to the "faulty education received by Victor" (Mellor, 50).

6. The absence of the mother.

A fact to be taken into consideration is the premature death of Mary Wollstonecraft, who left Mary Shelley orphan from the beginning of her life, just like Frankenstein's creature. Had she had a nurturing and caring mother, perhaps her life would not have been so difficult. Had the creature had a caring father, perhaps he would have developed himself in a different way. Mellor has also noted that "in all of Mary Shelley's fictional celebrations of the family, *the mother is absent*" (Mellor, 189. Emphasis mine). So, Caroline Frankenstein died early in the novel, right before his son moves to Ingolstad University; the De Lacey family was also without a mother and the same happens to Victor Frankenstein, who created a child without a female companion. The same occurs in other novels such as *Mathilda* or *Lodore.* According to Mellor (189), this

> reflects Mary Shelley's own motherless childhood. But more important, it undercuts her idealization of the egalitarian family because it makes it impossible for her to ground that ideology on a detailed examination of a sustained mother-child or husband-wife relationship.

So, Shelley reproduces the model of her own family in her novels, perhaps because it is the only one she knows, but at the same time, she uses the motherless family to recreate her idealized model. In this idealized model, Mellor argues, "the

mother could threaten and even displace the daughter's relationship with the father (as Mrs. Godwin had displaced Mary Godwin)" (Mellor, 189). Mary's relationship with her father could not tolerate a competition with a mother, thus, she is eliminated in most of her novels. Mellor theorizes that "perhaps Mary Shelley omitted the mother from idealized family because she found it impossible even to imagine a fully realized egalitarian marriage, given her own subservient relation with Percy Bysshe Shelley" (Mellor, 190).

Notwithstanding, Mary Shelley considers that the mother has a key role in the development of the child. Caroline was a dutiful mother who "draw inexhaustible stores of affection from a very mine of love to bestow upon [Victor]" and made him her "idol". In his infant years, Victor was "guided by a silken cord" along a path of happiness and love. He himself describes how a mother (and father) should behave towards his child with the example of his own mother: "[I was] their child, the innocent and helpless creature bestowed on them by Heaven, whom to bring up to good, ant whose future lot it was in their hands to direct to happiness or misery, *according as they fulfilled their duties towards me*" (Shelley, 35. Emphasis mine). Victor depicts the ideal atmosphere in which a child should be brought up and, at the same time, he places the responsibility of the future development of the child upon his parents' shoulders (a responsibility which he did not take for his child). They must guide the child and perform their duty towards him. This is contrasted with Victor's reaction when he saw his creature's "watering eyes" open for the first time and "rushed out of the room" (Shelley, 59). While Caroline and Alphonse had a "deep consciousness of what they owned towards the being to which they had given life" (Shelley, 35), Victor is even "unable to endure the aspect of the being [he] had created" (Shelley,59). A real mother

would not have abandoned her child just because he was ugly, a real mother has a duty towards her child, but Victor is not a mother, nor a father for that matter, but a "creator" who has created a living being from dead matter, not from love for another person. He cannot understand that his "motherhood" is fake until his "work" is finished and alive.

Victor's family (composed by Victor and his creature) is an imbalanced one. Similarly to the author's own family, a key person, the nurturing mother, is missing and this leads to an anomalous development of the child.

Shelley continuously contrasts happiness and sadness, love and neglect in *Frankenstein*. For example, she depicts two harmonious families, the Frankensteins and the De Laceys, before the creature intervenes in their lives, which are contrasted to the "family" composed by Victor and his creature. For both the Frankenstein and the De Laceys she took the model of the Baxter family, so different to hers and with whom she lived for two years. Mellor rightly points out that "observing the Baxters from the outside … Mary Godwin came to idealize the bourgeois family as the source both of emotional sustenance and of ethical value" (Mellor, 16). Kathleen Ann Goonan, in an interview with Kate Sisson, has observed that when Shelley arrived to Scotland, "she was embraced as the member of the Baxter family", while in her own house she was considered almost as an intruder by her stepmother. Goonan goes further pointing out that she had the "opportunity to "look into" the heart of a functional family, much as the monster observes the family whom he so longs to be a part of", thus, equating the author (Godwin's daughter) to the creature (Victor's son/product). Goonan also observes that "Frankenstein's description of his own childhood might serve as Shelley's own template for the role of ideal parents which... Shelley probably felt she had completely lacked" and this ideal was indeed based on the Baxters.

7. Unconscious desires.

Mellor comments that “Godwin's behavior tormented Mary, who continued to love him despite his manifest cruelty, duplicity, and selfishness.” She only conceived ideal femaleness as “shaped by service to her family” (Mellor 205), but not as a complete human being, an independent entity with her own desires and wishes. This may be because “Mary Shelley conceived herself as a follower, a worshiper at the altar of another. As a child her father was “my God …” as she confessed to Jane Williams” (Mellor, 179).

Mellor rightly considers that “Mary Shelley exhibits the classic symptoms of such a masochistic behavior” and she cites Karen Horney concerning masochism: “female masochism is a frequent outcome of the repressed female hostility generated from the daughter’s subordinated role within the hierarchical bourgeois family” (Mellor 202). For Horney, masochism is influenced by culture, not by biology. I would say that this masochism leads her to constantly forgive her father, but her repressed feelings flow when she writes her novel *Frankenstein* as a means of self-observation and sublimation. Self-observation and sublimation are two mechanisms of defense which “protect us from being consciously aware of a thought or feeling which we cannot tolerate. The defense only allows the unconscious thoughts or feelings to be expressed indirectly in a disguised form.” David Straker also points out that defense mechanisms “often appear unconsciously” and “tend to distort, transform or otherwise falsify reality”. I consider that Mary Shelley may have been unaware of her use of her internal repressed feelings towards her father; these emerged in *Frankenstein* not in their real form, but in a distorted projection of them on the characterization and behavior of the “monster”.

Sublimation can be defined as a redirection of a feeling into a socially productive activity, such as the writing of a poem or a novel. Self-observation implies introspection. Myerson suggests "that self-observation may be motivated by the wish to escape anxiety and guilt; it may be undertaken to *restore happy ties to a loved one* (emphasis mine), or to cope better with a demanding or competitive reality". Mary Shelley certainly needed to recover the love of the father who had publicly rejected her after her elopement and refused any contact with her. This led her to express her anxieties and feelings of loss, yet unconsciously, in the form of a terror story. This is because "[w]hen defensive processes break down, the mental elements defended against and certain connections of these elements become amenable to recollection and reconstructions" (Hartmann, qted. in Hatcher 392). Breaking down those mechanisms of defense created by our brain helps us to face an unpleasant reality in a more agreeable way, for that reason, Shelley's exercise of self-expression through sublimation helped her to face her father's rejection.

We must take into consideration another important point: the reasons why Mary Shelley opens her consciousness in novel form. In the preface of the 1831 edition of *Frankenstein,* she wrote that her novel emerged from a daydream in which she "saw — with shut eyes, but acute mental vision — "I saw the pale student of unhallowed arts kneeling beside the thing he had put together." (Shelley, 9). In fact, Shelley always had a habit of daydreaming, of imagining worlds of her own creation; she herself explained in the 1831 Introduction to *Frankenstein*: "I was not confined to my own identity, and I could people the hours with creations far more interesting to me at that age, than my own sensations" (Shelley, 6). This reveals the fact that she had a very active mind; according to neurologist Marcus Raichle, when the brain "is supposedly doing nothing

and daydreaming, it's really doing a tremendous amount" (qtd. in Darmouth Undergraduate Journal of Science).

As Freud points out, the true artist "understands how to elaborate his daydreams, so that they lose that personal note which grates upon strange ears and become enjoyable to others*; he knows too how to modify them* sufficiently so that their origin in prohibited sources is not easily detected" (qtd. in Archie. Emphasis mine). Shelley, as a true artist, had the ability to transform a daydream which only lasted a few seconds into a full-length novel. Freud continues explaining that the artist also

> possesses the mysterious ability to mold his particular material until it expresses the ideas of his phantasy faithfully; and then he knows how to attach to this reflection of his phantasy-life so strong a stream of pleasure that, for a time at least, *the repressions are outbalanced and dispelled by it.* When he can do all this, he opens out to others the way back to the comfort and consolation of their own unconscious sources of pleasure (qtd. in Archie. Emphasis mine).

Therefore, Shelley obtains a relief of her anxieties through the exercise of writing and giving free rein to those products of her imagination. For her, the expression of her inner thoughts, even those of which she is not aware of, is a liberation that helps her to reduce the anxiety caused by her father's hostility. Freud concludes that "[t]he motive forces of fantasies are unsatisfied wishes, and every single fantasy is the fulfillment of a wish, a correction of unsatisfying reality". According to him, only unsatisfied people daydream.

Mary Poovey's opinion is reinforced by Freud's: she considers that "for Mary Shelley, the imagination is properly a vehicle for escaping the self, not a … medium of self-expression" (Poovey, 140). For that reason, she associates writing with

"monstrosity, transgression and failure" and most of the characters of her different novels offer such traits. What began as a dream about a student-creator, shifted its focus to a narrative identified with his monstrous creation in which the creature has a lot to say.

We also must bear in mind that Victor Frankenstein abandons his family and affections in pursuance of a *dream*, the dream of discovering "the cause of generation and life" (53), a dream that turns into a living nightmare.

8. Autobiographical notes on Mary Shelley's works.

Mary Shelley, as a writer, was accustomed to use part of her personal life in her works. *Lodore,* for example, was about two lovers who "frantically flee their creditors" (Mellor, 28), just like they both had to do at the beginning of their marriage, when they lived a precarious life, changing lodgings to avoid being prosecuted by bailiffs.

On the other hand, *Mathilda* narrates the story of an incestuous relationship in which "the father himself becomes his daughter's lover" (Mellor, 189). In *Mathilda*, the mother of the main character dies right after her birth. Mathilda is raised with a "cold, austere aunt", very much alike to Shelley's stepmother; when she is sixteen, her father returns and she feels closely attached to him. Her father dismisses Mathilda's suitor and "avoid[s] her company" (Mellor, 193). At this point, the similitude with Mary Shelley's own life is undeniable and the idealization of the paternal figure is obvious. Mellor also explains that "*Mathilda* thus exemplifies the relationship of a powerful, loving man with a submissive, adoring young woman as father-daughter incest" (Mellor, 191). Incest never occurred between Mary and her father, but as Barbara Almond suggests, "the hidden issue [in *Frankenstein*] is Mary Shelley's concern about her own and her father's incestuous impulses" (Almond, 61), specially due to the excess of "romantic

attachment" felt by Mary towards her father during her childhood and adulthood. Shelley's father had already distanced himself of her during her adolescence and this culminated when she eloped with Percy.

Godwin was so aware that her daughter's novels were based on her own feelings that he impeded the publication of *Mathilda*. Mellor explains that "when she sent the fair copy to her father … he thought highly of parts of the story, although he found the subject "disgusting and detestable"". Mary asked him "either to revise it and publish the manuscript or to return it" to her. Mellor concludes "he did neither". The reason could have been that he "perceived … his daughter's portrait of his own equally horrendous failure as a loving supporting father" (Bonnie Rayford Newman, qtd. in Mellor, 255).

Mellor highlights some of these themes in all her novels: "the belief that a loving caring parent will produce a loving, caring child" (Mellor, 189), how "an uninhibited male egoism contributes to human suffering" (Mellor, 216) and the reflection of "Mary Shelley's passionate desire for an intensely loving relationship with both her father and her husband" (Mellor, 189). The first theme was already developed in *Frankenstein.* Victor's relatives and friends die one by one due to the actions of the vengeful creature. He himself dies at the age of twenty-five after a pursuit along thousands of miles.

9. Other influences in *Frankenstein.*

Mary Shelley was always encouraged to read. As I have said above, her father allowed her to use the books in his library and taught her his reading habits as that "the proper way to study was to read two or three books simultaneously" (Mellor, 11). Gilbert and Gubar emphasize Shelley's prolific reading before and during the writing of *Frankenstein,* a reading which shaped the composition of her novel. They explain that "she studied her parent's writings alone or together with Shelley" as if they were

functioning “as her surrogate parents” (Gilbert and Gubar, 223), but also gothic novels, and “a program of study in English, French and German literature”. For Gilbert and Gubar, the most significant reading was *Paradise Lost*, a work which shaped the very structure of *Frankenstein*:

> This novel’s key characters – Walton, Frankenstein and the monster – are obsessed with problem solving ... All three of them appear to be trying to understand their presence in the world and trying at the same time to define the nature of the lost paradise that must have existed before the fall (Gilbert and Gubar, 225).

These authors identify Walton as a fallen angel who is disobeying his father-God’s instructions – “my father’s dying injunction had forbidden my uncle to allow me to embark in a seafaring life” (Shelley, 16) –and travelling in pursuance of an impossible goal.

Frankenstein is another fallen angel, who lived in a Paradise of bliss and happiness until he manufactured a creature who made him “to become the most wretched of human beings” (Shelley, 76), “doomed to live” (Shelley, 182) even though he wished to die. Near the end of his life, he reflects on his creation and the trouble it has caused: “like the archangel who aspired to omnipotence, I am chained in an eternal hell” (Shelley, 214). A hell in life that has destroyed everything he loved most.

Nevertheless it is the creature who is moulded in a more Miltonic way. His language has been influenced by the reading of Paradise Lost, one of the books that shaped his character, and his beginnings were similar to those of Adam, created by a “God”: “Like Adam, I was created apparently united by no link to any other being in

existence" (Shelley, 132), but he soon discovers that he is different from Adam: "God in pity made man beautiful and alluring, after his own image; but my form is a filthy type of your's, more horrid from its very resemblance" (Shelley, 133). He reminds his maker the bonds that should unite them, but: "Remember I am thy creature. I ought to be thy Adam; but I am rather the fallen angel" (Shelley, 103). His identification with a wretched Lucifer is total and he alludes at the evil inside him: "Many times I consider Satan as the fitter emblem of my condition, for often like him, when I viewed the bliss of my protectors, the bitter gall of envy rose within me" (Shelley, 132). Those laments echo Shelley's "own buried feelings of parental abandonment and forced exile from her father" (Mellor, 46), but also the fallen angel's, as she was banned from a Godwinian paradise.

Not only the creature has been influenced by the reading of *Paradise Lost*. Victor too complains for being "cursed by some devil and carried about with me my eternal hell" (207), echoing thus the Miltonic narrator: "from the bottom stir/ The Hell within him" (Milton, IV, 19-20) and equating him with his creature in an inadvertent communion. Both creator and created are more similar than they suppose.

Gilbert and Gubar link the image of the fallen angel to Mary Shelley herself as she has examined "the fearful tale of a female fall from a lost paradise of art, speech and autonomy into a hell of sexuality, silence and filthy materiality" (Gilbert and Gubar, 227), from the bliss of her thoughts to the reality of her life, as art is the only thing that may redeem such reality. These authors also find a connection between Shelley's life and *Paradise Lost*: "Adam and Eve... began as motherless orphans reared (like Shelley herself) by a stern but kindly father-god, and ended as beggars rejected by God (as she was by *God*win when she eloped)" (Gilbert and Gubar, 227).

The influence of Shelley's mother, Mary Wollstonecraft, is also perceived in this novel. Wollstonecraft's *Maria* uses "several first-person narratives telling the same, mutually reinforcing story of the social oppression of women in different classes of society" (Clemit), although Shelley's frame narrative does not depict the oppression of women, but of a superhuman being symbolizing Shelley herself. When Victor tells his story, it is reinforced by the narration of the creature, who offers a different point of view which helps us to see him more human. The shift in perspective allows the reader to understand some details that had not been fully explained in the previous narration.

Among the many authors and works read by Shelley before the composition of *Frankenstein* and whose influence can be detected in the novel, I must mention Rousseau and his conception of innateness – "humans possess original goodness. Corrupting influences come from outside them" – (Craig, 799). This explains why the creature's mind is blank and innocent and then is shaped by the experiences he lives. For Rousseau, "a man left to himself from birth would be more than a monster than the rest" (Rousseau, qtd. in Mellor, 46), a quote that summarizes the solitary life of the creature in a hostile world. Rousseau's idea of the "noble savage" is also developed as he is "born free but everywhere in chains and inevitably corrupted by society" (Mellor, 47).

Other works read by Shelley prior to the writing of her novel are *The Sorrows of Young Werter,* by Goethe, and *Lives,* by Plutarch. The former is about a man who experiences unrequited love and commits suicide (Woodbridge); reading it, the creature learns "domestic manners" and "lofty sentiments and feelings" (Shelley, 131). Plutarch's *Lives* offered the creature an insight into "public affairs, governing" as well as "the greatest ardour for virtue" and "abhorrence for vice" (Shelley, 131-23). This

books, as well as *Paradise Lost* and Frankenstein's diary, are read by the creature during his learning process, thus equating it with Shelley's own studying process.

The latest scientific discoveries of the age are present in the novel. The author herself acknowledged in the 1831 Introduction the influence of Dr. Darwin's experiments or that of "Galvani's experiments into animal electricity" (Montillo). She could have learned about the later through one of her father's friends, Anthony Carlisle.

10. Conclusion.

Frankenstein is not only a horror tale, nor a nightmare for being told on winter nights, on the contrary, it is a work to be taken seriously. It is a deep novel in which its author explores her own emotions, feelings and life. This does not mean that Mary Shelley wrote an autobiography, but she merged different experiences with her deep knowledge of literature and the latest scientific discoveries. The result was a fantastic story completely born from her imagination which can be considered a modern myth. As we have seen, her creativity was enormous.

In *Frankenstein,* Shelley addressed many topics: the ethics of modern science, the innate good in man, male egotism, the abandonment of affections, ugliness as a way of otherness, the significance of naming and identity and, more importantly, the importance of parental care and nurturing in the development of children or, more accurately, of its absence.

Mary Shelley's life was marked by absences: a dead mother, an absent father, more occupied on himself than on his daughter, and an absent husband who neglected his duties and support to Mary and her children in order to have time for his own writing, his love affairs and his own amusements. All these absences merge in the novel

and shape the characters. The absences also justify the rage of the creature, a reflection of Mary Shelley herself. The creature gives voice to Mary Shelley's feelings: everything she could not say in her own voice was transmitted by her monster.

Perhaps, the best feature of *Frankenstein* is that it achieved masterpiece status through the use of very different materials. Its author found a channel to express herself using a highly innovative narrative. The author herself gave us a clue about her process of creation: "[i]nvention … does not consist in creating out of void, but out of chaos" (Shelley, 8), her own chaos.

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